

Message Text

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44

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 AF-06 EUR-12 EA-06 IO-10 ISO-00 INR-07 MED-02

NSAE-00 PA-01 RSC-01 OES-03 USIA-06 PRS-01 CIAE-00

HEW-02 AID-05 FDRE-00 DODE-00 SCS-03 PM-03 H-01 L-02

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 SCA-01 /104 W
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R 141355Z JAN 75

FM AMEMBASSY JIDDA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9822

USMISSION GENEVA

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI

AMEMBASSY ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY ANKARA

AMEMBASSY BANKO

AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY BANJUL

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY CONAKRY

AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY DAKAR

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

AMEMBASSY DOHA

AMEMBASSY FREETOWN

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMCONSUL KADUNA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY LAGOS

AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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AMEMBASSY MANAMA

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO
AMEMBASSY MUSCAT
AMEMBASSY NDJAMENA
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
AMEMBASSY OUAGADOUGOU
AMEMBASSY RABAT
AMEMBASSY SANAA
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMEMBASSY TUNIS
AMEMBASSY YAOUNDE
USMISSION USUN

C O N F I D E N T I A L JIDDA 0282

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O.: 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, SA, XA, XB
SUBJ: CHOLERA IN SAUDI ARABIA

REF : A. RABAT 0135 (NOTAL); B. JIDDA 0006 (NOTAL)

SUMMARY: THE OUTBREAK OF CHOLERA DURING THIS YEAR'S HAJJ SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN BROUGHT QUICKLY UNDER CONTROL BUT PROBABLY INVOLVED MORE CASES THAN IN ANY RECENT YEAR. WHILE THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE ORIGINAL CASES WERE IMPORTED, SOME CHOLERA HAS PROBABLY BEEN EXPORTED BY RETURNING HAJJIS. ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF CHOLERA CASES VARY CONSIDERABLY AND THE SAG IS UNLIKELY EVER TO PUBLISH RELIABLE FIGURES. END SUMMARY.

1. THERE SEEMS LITTLE DOUBT THAT THE FIRST CASES OF CHOLERA DURING THE PILGRIMAGE BEGAN--FOR WHATEVER REASON--WITH NIGERIAN PILGRIMS. IT IS ALSO CLEAR THAT THE SAG HAS TAKEN WHAT MEASURES IT COULD TO PREVENT ITS SPREAD THROUGH IT HAS GIVEN OUT ONLY LIMITED INFORMATION ON ITS OWN ACTIONS AND ON THE EXTENT OF THE DISEASE. THE DISEASE HAS APPARENTLY CONFIDENTIAL

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BEEN LARGELY CONFINED TO MEDINA AND MECCA, THROUGH THE APPEARANCE OF CASES IN JIDDA LED TO CLOSING OF SCHOOLS FOR ONE WEEK UNTIL JANUARY 11. A DOCTOR IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH INFORMS US THAT THE DISEASE ALSO APPEARED IN RIYADH WHERE THE NUMBER OF CASES INCREASED FROM FOUR ON JANUARY 4 TO 20 ON JANUARY 8. THE DISEASE NOW APPEARS TO BE UNDER CONTROL IN SAUDI ARABIA BUT AS NOTED IN REF A INFECTED PILGRIMS ARE DOUBTLESS CARRYING THE DISEASE BACK HOME. WORLD HEALTH

ORGANIZATION, WHILE WARNING OF POSSIBLE PILGRIMAGE SPREAD OF CHOLERA, GAVE SAG HIGH MARKS ON CONTROL MEASURES.

2. GIVEN THE NEAR SILENCE OF THE SAG ON THE SUBJECT, EVEN AN ACCURATE ESTIMATE OF THE NUMBERS OF CASES IS DIFFICULT. THE LAST SAUDI FIGURE ON NUMBER OF DEATHS WAS 45, GIVEN ABOUT A WEEK AGO. EMBASSIES OF MUSLIM COUNTRIES ARE POTENTIALLY GOOD SOURCES OF INFORMATION SINCE THEY ALL MAINTAIN SPECIAL HAJJ OFFICES AND MEDICAL SERVICES CENTERS IN MECCA, BUT ESTIMATES FROM THESE SOURCES HAVE VARIED FAIRLY WIDELY. TURKISH FIRST SECRETARY KIRECTEPE HAD PERHAPS THE MOST ALARMIST REPORT. ON JANUARY 6 HE TOLD US THAT THE TURKISH MEDICAL TEAM HAD BEEN TURNING OVER TO SAUDI MEDICAL AUTHORITIES MORE THAN 50 SUSPECTED CHOLERA CASES PER DAY AND THAT HE EXPECTED THE NUMBER OF CHOLERA DEATHS AMONG TURKS ALONE TO RUN BETWEEN 400 AND 600. OTHER SOURCES HAVE CONFIRMED SOME CHOLERA AMONG THE TURKISH HAJJ DELEGATION (WHICH JUMPED FROM ABOUT 30,000 LAST YEAR TO WELL OVER 100,000 THIS YEAR WITH THE OPENING BY TURKISH AUTHORITIES OF THEIR FRONTIERS TO OVERLAND PILGRIMAGE TRAVEL). WE THINK KIRECTEPE'S ESTIMATES IS SURELY HIGH AND COULD BE INFLUENCED BY HIS "MODERN", SECULARIST, PERSONAL DISTASTE FOR THE GREAT GROWTH IN TURKISH PILGRIMAGE ATTENDANCE.

3. AMONG OUR BEST SOURCES TO DATE ON THIS SUBJECT HAS BEEN THE INDIAN FIRST SECRETARY ARIF HUSSEIN, A MUSLIM WHO MADE THE HAJJ THIS YEAR AND ALSO MADE ALL THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE 21,000 MEMBER INDIAN DELEGATION. HE HAD HIGH PRAISE FOR THE SAUDI HANDLING OF THE FAR GREATER THAN EXPECTED INFUX OF PILGRIMS AND THE MANNER IN WHICH THE CHOLERA OUTBREAK WAS DEALT WITH. HE CONFIRMED THAT THE MECCA WATER SUPPLY WAS JUDGED BY SAG AUTHORITIES TO BE POLLUTED FOR TWO DAYS AND THAT THIS FACT WAS ANNOUNCED TO THE PILGRIMS. HE SAID THAT ONE OF

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THE GREATEST DEFICIENCIES WHICH HE OBSERVED WAS THE RELATIVE SHORTAGE OF TOILET FACILITIES--IN SOME CASES ONLY SEVEN OR EIGHT TOILETS FOR AN ENCAMPMENT OF 700 OR 800 PILGRIMS. ONCE CHOLERA STRUCK THIS WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN A FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO ITS SPREAD. HUSSEIN SAID HE RETURNED TO MECCA JANUARY 10 TO LOOK AFTER THE CONDITION OF INDIAN PILGRIMS STILL IN THE AREA AND WAS OF THE OPINION THAT AT THAT TIME CHOLERA THERE WAS FIRMLY UNDER CONTROL.

4. WITH ALL HIS PRAISE FOR THE SAUDIS' HANDLING OF THE PROBLEM, HUSSEIN GAVE A SURPRISINGLY HIGH FIGURE FOR THE NUMBER OF CASES--SLIGHTLY UNDER SEVEN THOUSAND, INCLUDING 800 CASES IN JIDDA. HE SAID THAT HE HAD THE FIGURE FROM "RELIABLE MEDICAL AUTHORITIES" AND THAT HE WAS "ABSOLUTELY SURE" THAT IT WAS CORRECT. HE HAD NO INFORMATION ON THE NUMBER OF DEATHS BUT

THOUGHT SOMETHING OVER ONE THOUSAND WOULD BE CONSISTENT WITH WHAT HE HAD SEEN AND HEARD. HE PROMISED TO OBTAIN FOR US A FIGURE WHICH HE BELIEVES WILL BE THE ACTUAL NUMBER.

5. EACH YEAR THERE ARE RUMORS--GENERALLY EXAGGERATED--OF CHOLERA BREAKING OUT DURING THE HAJJ. THIS YEAR THE RUMORS CLEARLY HAVE A LEAST SOME FOUNDATION. WE DOUBT THAT THE SAG WILL MAKE ANY OFFICIAL ANNOUNCEMENT CONCERNING THE NUMBER OF CHOLERA CASES OR DEATHS. IN TIME, HOWEVER, WE EXPECT THAT WE SHALL BE ABLE TO GET A MORE ACCURATE PICTURE AS, FOR INSTANCE, THE PASSPORTS OF THE DECEASED ARE TURNED IN TO THEIR EMBASSIES.

6. WHILE WE FIND SAG RETICENCE ANNOYING, WE NOTE THAT THE SAG THIS YEAR QUICKLY ACKNOWLEDGED AND FACED UP TO THE EXISTENCE OF CHOLERA AND ACTED ENERGETIC
LLH TO CURB IT.

7. FOR U.S. MISSION GENEVA: WE WOULD APPRECIATE ANY INFORMATION YOU MIGHT ELICIT FROM THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION ON THE CHOLERA SITUATION IN SAUDI ARABIA.

8. COMMENT: THE EXPERIENCE WITH THIS YEAR'S PILGRIMAGE HEALTH CARE WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY CAUSE SAG TO MODIFY ITS PILGRIMAGE CONTROL MEASURES WITH GREATER INSPECTION AND CONTROL BY SAUDI MEDICAL SERVICES. THERE IS ALSO TALK IN GOVERNMENT CIRCLES OF A QUOTA BEING IMPOSED ON THE NUMBER OF PILGRIMS FROM
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ANY COUNTRY IN ORDER TO AVOID THE UNEXPECTED AND LARGE INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PILGRIMS WHICH WAS A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO THIS YEAR'S CHOLERA OUTBREAK.
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